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ABSTRACT

This paper, meant to stimulate discussion within the employment and training community, offers a wide range of strategies for keeping clients enrolled in Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs. Issues discussed include the following: (1) why retention is important; (2) gathering and analyzing information; (3) links between client recruitment and retention; (4) retention through intake; (5) technologies for increasing retention after enrollment; (6) improving on-the-job retention; and (7) retaining employers through good times and bad. The handbook stresses throughout that client retention is not an issue that begins after job placement; by then it is often too late. Retention begins with program planning and design, continues through recruitment, intake, program participation, and job placement. The handbook points out some places to start. (KC)

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ISSUES IN TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

KEEPING THE CLIENT:

JTPA RETENTION MADE (MUCH!) EASIER

JODIE SUE KELLY
AND
MAX ELSMAN

INTRODUCTION BY
JERALD T. MCNEIL

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

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KEEPING THE CLIENT:

JTPA RETENTION MADE (MUCH!) EASIER

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INTRODUCTION BY
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KEEPING THE CLIENT: JTPA RETENTION MADE (MUCH!) EASIER

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KEEPING THE CLIENT: JTPA RETENTION MADE (MUCH!) EASIER

Preface

The National Association of Counties (NACo) is pleased to publish this *Issue Paper* entitled "Keeping the Client: JTPA Retention Made (Much!) Easier". Recently, much discussion has focused on the need for long-term training especially as job training programs seek to address the training and employment needs of harder to serve groups. However, little constructive discussion has addressed the significant problems associated with keeping clients in long term training. This paper offers a wide range of strategies for keeping clients enrolled which service delivery area professionals may choose to utilize as they seek to retain clients in training.

The National Association of Counties has a long standing commitment to quality job training programs. As the Introduction by Jerald T. McNeil, director of NACo's Training and Employment Programs indicates, we believe very strongly that the key to JTPA's continued success is its ability to provide quality job training services. This paper is just one in a series that we intend to publish to assist service delivery areas which are seeking to improve the quality of services. Its authors -- Jodie Sue Kelly and Max Elsman of Cygnet Associates, a consulting firm based in Annapolis, Maryland -- have had substantial experience assisting service delivery areas increase client retention.

This paper was sponsored by NACo's Training and Employment Programs, through a grant from the United States Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. This paper is meant to stimulate discussion within the employment and training community. We would appreciate your comments. Please address your comments to Neil E. Bomberg, Research Associate and Editor, Issue Papers Series, National Association of Counties, 440 First Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001.

KEEPING THE CLIENT: JTPA RETENTION MADE (MUCH!) EASIER

Introduction

by Jerald T. McNeil, Director, Training and Employment Programs
National Association of Counties

Increasing the capacity of local job training programs to retain clients who enroll may be one ofthe best investments we can make to improve the quality of client services. Developing and implementing methods for keeping clients in training may be significantly less costly, in several-ways, than over enrolling applicants, on the expectation that some percentage will withdraw from training or taking other actions to shore up relatively low completion rates.

The psychological costs to clients who withdraw from training — clients who often come to these training programs with preconceived ideas about their ability to succeed — can be significant. The financial costs to training programs which must adapt their training activities to larger numbers of participants may be great and ultimately and unnecessarily inflate the per participant and per placement costs. And the cost to the reputation of a job training program which is confronted with large numbers of disgruntled and disaffected trainees can effect the long-term ability of the program to recruit applicants.

Recent discussions among policy makers have focused on the importance of improving the overall quality of Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) job training services. These discussions have acknowledged the changing characteristics of the JTPA eligible population, the need to target services on the hard-to-serve, and the general view within Congress and the Administration that limited and scarce resources must be effectively spent. These discussions also have acknowledged that the JTPA system is a mature system which no longer must deal, solely, with such basic implementation issues as establishing private industry councils, developing client intake systems, establishing a basic administrative capacity, and other activities related to the establishment and everyday operation of programs.

However, these discussions have not focused on improving client retention. For example, the Secretary of Labor's JTPA Advisory Committee — a panel of service delivery area administrators, private industry council members, community based organization representatives, public interest group representatives and state and national policy makers whose mandate is to review the nation's job training system and recommend improve ments in it — recently issued a report entitled "Working Capital: JTPA Invest ments for the 90's." In keeping with the general thrust of recent discus sions, the Committee identified a number of proposals which it believes the federal government and its state and local government and private sector partners should adopt to improve the overall quality of job training services. These include:

- targeting program services more directly at disadvantaged persons with signifcant basic and job skills deficiencies;
- individualizing client services;
- increasing the overall quality of the services provided; and
- relaxing program constraints to increase system responsiveness to meet the unique needs of persons with significant barriers to employment.

These recommendations reflected increasing evidence that:

- program quality and enhanced employability are inextricably intertwined; and
- job training programs will be expected to increase the ability of participants to be employed with greater earnings capabilities.

However, the report failed to address, directly, the importance of retention as a method for improving the quality of job training services.

This has occurred at the same time that the Committee, the US Department of Labor and the Congress are attempting to push the job training system toward multi-dimensional and sequential training programs to meet the specific needs of economically disadvantaged persons with multiple barriers to employment. We, in the job training community, must ask the policy makers and ourselves, how we can improve the overall quality of job training without giving serious consideration to keeping our clients in training? We must ask ourselves whether it is enough to focus on changing the funding formulae, the performance standards by allowing competency-based outcomes in addition to job placement outcomes, and the program structure by placing increased emphasis on youth programming, without giving serious consideration to retention issues?

Prior to 1988, most JTPA applicants had some basic skills and job experience. They had participated in the labor market before, but were out of work temporarily and in need of short term, relatively inexpensive job training and placement assistance. Increasingly, JTPA clients lack basic job-related educational skills; have little or no work experience; and are drawn from those groups which are considered the hardest-to-serve: long-term welfare recipients, homeless men and women, teenage mothers and fathers, high school dropouts or displaced home makers.

Those whom we now label as "hard-to-serve" are also the most difficult to keep in training. They require intensive, long term training which combines basic and job skills training, work experience, supportive services, including day care and needs-based payments. And yet, it is the very length and complexity of these programs which makes them so difficult to complete.

These programs, also, are very expensive. For example, the Connecticut Department of Income Maintenance estimates that service delivery areas must spend approximately $8,500 to train and place a long-term welfare recipient with little or no work experience who is in need of extensive basic and job skills training. At a time when budgetary concerns predominate in Washington, we, the JTPA system, can ill afford to invest so much money in these individuals unless we develop effective ways of keeping them in training so that they can become economically self-sufficient.

This paper addresses the retention issue. It offers numerous suggestions for improving retention among clients. And though the suggestions made by Jodie Sue Kelly and Max Elsman can be applied to all programs — short- or long-term — they are particularly useful for those job training programs which are implementing long-term training efforts targeted at the hard-to-serve. The use of the retention strategies and methods identified in this Issue Paper should prove cost effective and maximize the success of each local program.

During the coming months, the National Association of Counties Training and Employment Programs plans to release other papers addressing the quality of program services. We hope that you find this Issue Paper and future papers interesting and beneficial for your program.

KEEPING THE CLIENT: JTPA RETENTION MADE (MUCH!) EASIER

I. OVERVIEW

In Montgomery County, Maryland, a welfare mother named Lisa Parkins is on the verge of independence. She is one of 116 participants in the promising new Family Independence Project. Based on models developed in Massachusetts and California, the program is an intensive and long-term effort to equip the chronically unemployed with life skills as well as job skills.

The program marshals the entire range of social services into a comprehensive package. Clients continue to receive welfare as they train. But services also include day care, transportation and health care.

The Family Independence Project represents the current "state of the art" in the employment and training arena. No corners have been cut. Without question, intensive programs like these are society's best hope of helping the chronically unemployed achieve self-sufficiency. Lisa Parkins and many of her fellow participants stand a good chance of breaking the cycle of welfare dependence.

Yet, as always, success is relative. How many participants will not make it? Interim figures from the Family Independence Project are revealing. A total of 316 applicants began the year-long program. Within a few weeks, 197 participants had dropped out (62.3 percent). By the end of the first few months, an additional 45 participants had left (37.8 percent). Thus, 10 months into the program, just 14.2 percent of the original applicants were still enrolled.

No doubt many welfare recipients are not ready for the rigors of a long-term program. But employment training programs of all kinds often suffer from relatively high dropout rates — and not just among AFDC recipients. Even short-term JTPA programs experience significant retention problems, in the program and on the job. Some SDAs report dropout rates of 50 percent or more in programs such as work-readiness training and remedial education. Statistics from other SDAs show that as many as six clients must be recruited to result in one positive termination. Job retention is a problem we have just begun to address. The U.S. Department of Labor's performance standards require that we measure 13-week retention. But measurement alone is not enough. We must begin structuring program activities to increase retention.

But as we shall see, there are numerous social and practical benefits of doing everything possible to increase client retention rates. This handbook brings together dozens of tips and techniques that can be used by virtually any employment and training program. Some are short-term "fix-it" tips; others are long-term strategies. Both are necessary to maximize client retention.

The material in this handbook has been drawn from a variety of sources: social services research; private sector personnel practices; market research; research on voluntary organizations; and Cygnet Associates' experience working with dozens of service delivery areas.

Client retention has only recently become an issue of serious concern. JTPA recruitment shortfalls and the Labor Department's 13-week follow-up standards have pushed the issue toward the forefront. As a result, the job training community is still groping toward solutions.

Model retention programs do not exist as yet. Fortunately, however, the techniques in this handbook show promise in helping us get a better handle on an increasingly serious issue.

In the following sections, we will explore retention "hot spots" — those points of contact between JTPA clients, programs and jobs that have the most impact on retention. These include:

- program availability;
- client assessment and enrollment;
- program design;
- program staffing;
- program location and facilities;
- program reward systems;

- job matching; and,
- placement follow-up.

It is very possible that your JTPA programs are already implementing some of these retention techniques. The goal is to create an integrated system that focuses its resources not just on job placement but on long-term job retention as well.

As we shall see, improving client retention involves everyone in the organization, from the director to the job developer to the receptionist. As you read this booklet, don't just focus on those strategies that apply to your job — keep the big picture in mind, too.

For example, a job developer should be very concerned about client retention through the intake process. If intake is losing a high percentage of applicants, many are probably among the most highly skilled and motivated — clients highly prized by job developers. But intake systems that are cumbersome and tedious drive away clients who feel they have other job-getting options.

By working together, JTPA administrators and staff can create a comprehensive retention-boosting program in which everyone benefits.

II. WHY RETENTION IS IMPORTANT

There are numerous reasons why client retention may deserve more attention:

1. Clarifying Our Mission: As it is designed and implemented, JTPA often gives us mixed signals. On the one hand, congressional intent was to create a system to equip people with the skills to get and keep good jobs and to maintain self-sufficiency. At the same time, however, JTPA rewards SDAs primarily for job placement. There is a major difference, however, between placement and long-term job retention. The Labor Department's 13-week follow-up standards recognize that simply getting a job is not a particularly valid predictor of an individual's likelihood of being successful in the labor market. A renewed focus on long-term success can add focus to a JTPA system as well as motivate staff to ensure better retention.

2. Using Resources More Efficiently: Every positive termination represents an SDA's investment of thousands of dollars and (often) many hours of staff time. Under a performance contracting system, the "investment" analogy is even more true. Consequently, any client who leaves a program or a job produces a substantial loss on investment. Because JTPA resources are always scarce, it makes good managerial sense to ensure that every dollar invested produces a desired result. For example, in a 100-slot program with a performance payment of $2,500 per placement, every 10 percent increase in retention produces additional income of $25,000. Similarly, better retention can be a major factor in lowering the actual cost per placement.

Additionally, it is expensive and time-consuming to recruit new applicants simply to replace clients who drop out or are negatively terminated. It is far easier, cheaper and more efficient to retain more of your clients.

3. Making Recruitment Easier: Most SDAs rely heavily on word-of-mouth for new recruits. And good word-of-mouth depends on satisfying the needs of applicants. Programs that experience high dropout rates or poor job retention often are not meeting the clients' perceived needs. Refocusing program design and implementation can be an important solution to the recruitment problem.

4. Improving Positive Termination Statistics: Often, clients in programs with low dropout rates are more motivated to get and keep jobs. And when more clients get jobs, the SDA is in a better position to receive DOL incentive money. In this quest, the transition from program to job is crucial. A variety of techniques can be used to help the client make the transition more easily. The result is more positive terminations with less staff work.

5. Meeting DOL 13-Week Follow-up Standards: Building retention into every phase of training and placement is the fastest, most cost-effective way to meet these new standards. SDAs that focus on retention now will be spared the trauma of a "quick fix" when it's already too late.

6. Building Better Relationships with Employers: Higher job retention rates cannot help but in-

crease employer involvement and satisfaction. Especially in labor-intensive industries that are experiencing hiring difficulties, a good JTPA placement and follow-up system can be the key incentive for employers.

III. GATHERING AND ANALYZING INFORMATION

It is wise to begin retention efforts with clients who have already enrolled or been placed – these are the clients in whom you have invested the most time and money. Therefore, improved retention will provide a better and faster payback.

But before we can begin to solve a retention problem, we need good information. The place to start is to gather information that answers three major questions:

1. When are you losing clients?
2. Whom are you losing?
3. Why are you losing them?

To answer the first two, it is necessary to have a client tracking system to identify problem areas. Some JTPA systems have good management information systems that can produce this information. Most do not.

Essentially, the idea is to measure your retention rate after each point of contact between the client and the JTPA system. For example, tally the number of telephone inquiries you get and compare this to the number of people who come in to pick up an application after phoning. This number will help you gauge the effectiveness of your telephone sales efforts.

You will also want to measure the number and percentage of clients who:

1. begin the application process but do not complete it;
2. make intake or assessment appointments but do not keep them;
3. complete a multi-day assessment;
4. complete work-readiness training;
5. complete classroom programs;
6. remain on the job for 13 weeks or more;
7. do not fulfill a promise to check in with job developers; and
8. do not renew their application after 45 days.

Not all SDAs are alike, so your process may not include all these points of contact. But however your program is set up, make certain you can obtain data that measure client retention through each step of the process.

If you discover you are losing 20 percent or more of your clients between any two points of contact (application and assessment, for example), then this would be the first place to begin implementing retention techniques.

You will also want to examine the ratio between the number of JTPA applicants found to be eligible and those placed into jobs. Many programs have large numbers of eligible clients who, for one reason or another, do not receive services and are therefore not formally enrolled. Not only does this practice generate negative word-of-mouth on the street, it also requires your program to put forth a great deal of effort serving clients for whom you will not get credit.

If this is a problem for your program, you either will want to increase the number served from this pool, or reduce the size of it. If three or more clients remain in this pool for every client placed, then a reordering of your program process is advised.

Besides analyzing the points at which clients are dropping out, you will also want to look at who is being lost. For example, are you losing a higher percentage of school dropouts than other groups? Do enough older workers apply for services but quit or get lost somewhere in the process? Do you lose more blacks, Asians or Hispanics than whites? More youth than adults?

Where losses are concentrated among some client groups, the explanation often can be found among the mix of JTPA programs and services. Every JTPA program is more appropriate for some clients than others. For example, many SDAs maximize the range of classroom training options by purchasing individual slots in existing vocational programs. But only clients with good academic and study skills are likely to succeed in this kind of environment. High-school dropouts would be less likely to enroll and or succeed in such programs.

Similarly, school dropouts are less likely to do well in a training program set up like a traditional classroom. And in employer-driven job development systems (where clients are matched to incoming job orders), very low-skilled individuals are not likely to do well. Employers generally do not request workers with poor skills or attitudes.

Only by determining which clients are dropping out, can you discover whether or not a bias against certain groups exists. Rarely is such bias built into a system consciously. Often it is the result of declining levels of unemployment. As the jobless rate has dropped, the academic and job readiness levels of applicants have declined as well. The program mix and activities must change to accommodate the client needs or retention problems inevitably will result.

In addition to answering the questions, "When are clients dropping out?" and "Who is dropping out?", we also need to know, "Why are they leaving?" Only the client can provide this information.

Client suggestion and feedback systems can be valuable methods of obtaining clients' insights. A suggestion system accomplishes two goals. First, research in the private sector shows that the average satisfied customer will tell four other people about his or her happy experience with a product or service. A dissatisfied customer, however, will tell 17! But a dissatisfied customer who has the opportunity to complain quickly and easily will only tell three or four others about their unhappiness. The lesson is clear: a suggestion or feedback system can reduce negative word of mouth by identifying and resolving complaints internally. If a pattern emerges from the suggestions of clients, then it may be wise to redesign programs to increase retention, motivation and satisfaction.

Many programs have tried suggestion systems without much success. Often, clients do not use the system. For the system to work, follow these rules:

1. Suggestion cards should be pre-printed and use simple rating scales (1 through 5, for example).
2. Suggestion cards should be given to everyone as part of the application or orientation packet.
3. Clients should be reminded of the system and encouraged to use it.
4. The suggestion box should be placed in a high-traffic area, not in the corner of the room.
5. The box should be locked. This shows everyone you are serious about your system.
6. All suggestion cards which are signed should get a written response from the program manager. Don't panic; few clients will sign their complaints or their compliments.
7. Cards can be printed so they are also self-mailers.

Clients who do not want to place a suggestion card in the box can mail the card to the agency (postage pre-paid, of course).

IV. LINKS BETWEEN CLIENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

As the previous section on research makes clear, client retention begins with recruitment. An earlier Cygnet handbook, published by the National Association of Counties, "JTPA Recruitment Made (Much!) Easier," detailed several marketing strategies to increase the number of applicants and encourage more of them to complete eligiblity verification.

Rather than recap that information we wish to emphasize just one major point: that you will have more retention success if you actively recruit clients likely to do well in your programs, rather than just selecting from among those who walk through the door or are referred by other agencies.

For example, a small youth program in rural Virginia competes for recruits against a much larger jobs program that is much better known in the community. Because of budget limitations, it is impossible for the smaller program to conduct an intensive public relations or advertising campaign. To survive, it has forged strong links with other social agencies, notably programs for the handicapped and for drug and alcohol abusers.

This is a clever solution, but it has skewed the incoming client population heavily toward youth with severe employability barriers. Such high-risk clients generally require special curricula and strong support services and resources this smaller program does not have. Consequently, recruitment and retention continue to be a struggle.

Agency referrals are one of the two major recruitment methods for most SDAs (the other is word of mouth). So it is wise to step back and assess the types of clients you are getting from other agencies. For example, you may have a large influx of teenage mothers as a result of links with school counselors and community health centers. But if your programs do not offer good day-care services, retention will be an unsolvable problem.

In addition, a passive reliance on agency referrals can also change your client mix very suddenly. A new link with the local detention facility, for example, may suddenly flood your program with hard-core ex-offenders who read at very low levels. This means your program services need to change quickly to adapt to the clients' needs. But this is often impractical and does not happen frequently.

Similarly, your current enrollees are a good source of referrals but will generally refer people much like themselves. In other words, ex-offenders will refer other ex-offenders and so on. This is fine — if you have appropriate program services. The lesson here is clear: if you have a passive recruitment strategy, you will run the risk of getting large numbers of new clients who may not be well matched with your current mix of services. The result: lower retention and unhappy clients. Often it is better to have an agressive, well-planned recruitment strategy — in other words, to go after specific client groups you know will do best in your programs. The handbook, "Recruitment Made (Much!) Easier" details a variety of targeted marketing strategies to accomplish this goal.

V. RETENTION THROUGH INTAKE

Often, it is the clients at both ends of the scale (the most and the least job-ready) who are lost during the intake, eligibility verification and enrollment process. The reason is that most JTPA intake systems impose a very high cost on enrollment: the time and trouble of getting paperwork, revealing personal details and poor academic skills, and making trips to intake centers or program sites.

Most JTPA intake tends to reflect the old CETA system, in which client recruitment and retention were not such pressing issues. The process, as outlined below, was designed to screen clients out by extracting the "price" before outlining the value.

Step 1. Initial inquiry by clients (who are told only about eligibility requirements);
Step 2. Intake and eligibility verification;
Step 3. Orientation briefing on services;
Step 4. Testing and assessment; and
Step 5. Program referral and enrollment.

During CETA, most areas of the country experienced higher unemployment than we have in the late 1980s. Therefore, recruitment was not a problem. In addition, stipends were allowed under CETA and were a powerful recruitment lure. Typically, more people applied for services than could be accommodated. The natural response was to create intake systems that screened people out, not in.

Under such systems, clients are immediately told about paperwork and eligibility, usually over the phone — in other words, the "price of admission." In a high unemployment economy, clients had few other options, so they were willing to gather the necessary paperwork to enroll.

A. Retention Strategy #1: Orientation First

Unemployment peaked just as JTPA was enacted and has declined steadily since. In today's economy, we can no longer afford the luxury of screening people out. We need to set up systems to screen more people in.

Some SDAs have chosen to simplify and restructure the intake process. Here is one way to do it:

1. Initial inquiry by clients (who are told briefly about general benefits of JTPA and are invited to an orientation. Eligibility and documents are not mentioned.);

2. Orientation and testing (one visit, documents are discussed after staff sell the benefits of JTPA); and

3. Intake and eligibility; program referral (one visit) including referral of ineligible clients to other employment and training services.

Notice that after only two trips, the client is through intake and ready to begin receiving program services.

Orientation should be structured to sell clients on program benefits before intake and eligibility are discussed. Under a "paperwork-first" system, clients pay the price of JTPA admission before they hear the benefits. Clients know little about the services JTPA has to offer. It is no wonder, then, that many choose not to begin the application process or drop out before their paperwork is complete. How many of us would be willing to buy a product or service under similar conditions?

There are two major arguments against the streamlined "orientation-first" system, however:

1. Telling clients over the phone what documents to bring saves them a trip.

This is a good idea in theory but rarely works in practice. SDAs that keep accurate records report that only about half the clients come to an intake appointment with all their documents. The rest have some, but not all. They still need to make a return trip. And the percentage of clients willing to return a second (or third) time drops off rapidly.

Under the "orientation-first" system, clients are instructed one-on-one during orientation what to bring so as to better prepare them and lessen their frustration. Systems that have switched to this practice find that clients do a better job of getting their documents in order. A face-to-face meeting is always superior to instructions given over the phone.

2. Ineligibles will be angry that they made a special trip only to discover they do not qualify.

Ineligibles will be disappointed that they did not qualify for JTPA services. However, several strategies can be used to lessen their disappointment. First, ineligibles should be given a short booklet on job seeking skills, including how to compose a resume, complete an application and interview for a job. Second, they should be given a list of other service providers in the area. This list might include day care, employment agencies, Job Service, vocational schools, thrift stores, food distribution sites — all the agencies that provide any kind of assistance.

Finally, it is helpful to give ineligibles leads for jobs that job developers cannot fill with current enrollees. Anaheim, California, which provides these types of services, reports that ineligibles often express their thanks for the help and later say positive things about the program to others — thus increasing word-of-mouth recruitment.

For clients eligible for services, there is great benefit in beginning the intake process with orientation. First, clients get to hear about all the positive services they can obtain. This increases their motivation and gives them a clearer understanding of what is available and what is not.

B. Retention Strategy #2: Streamlining the Paperwork

Orientation also allows staff to help clients gather eligibility documents. For example, if a client does not have proof of income, then staff can have them sign a form authorizing the agency to obtain it for the client. This again reduces the price of admission and makes it easier for the client to proceed through the system. Grand Rapids, Michigan, has streamlined the process by seeing to it that the staff become certified as notaries, selective service officers and voter registrars. Providing help through the difficulties of verification also makes the organization seem warmer, friendlier and more caring. It is good customer service and motivates the client. Generally, the applications and other paperwork required to enter the system are plagued with three problems, all of them solvable. First, forms and orientation materials are written at reading levels far

above those of most JTPA clients. The average client reads at about the sixth grade level. Therefore, all paperwork (intake forms, applications, orientation handbooks, outreach letters, etc.) should be written well below the sixth grade level. Second, the tone of most paperwork often sounds cold and bureaucratic. For example, letters informing clients about the 45-day paperwork expiration date often read something like the following example from an SDA in Michigan:

> "Your 45-day limit is about to expire. If we don't hear from you immediately, we will assume you are no longer interested in PIC services."

A far warmer and inviting way to write the same message would be:

> "If we are going to help you get a job, we must hear from you right away."

Third, as described earlier, most clients need help getting their paperwork. Some of it would be difficult for anyone to round up; it is not a legitimate test of a client's motivation or seriousness about getting training or a job. Conducting orientation first allows us to offer that help right away.

A related retention issue applies to those programs that do not allow someone without all their paperwork to see an intake counselor. Often, a receptionist checks over a client's paperwork. If something is missing, then the client is rescheduled. From a retention standpoint, a better system is to conduct orientation first and complete as much of the intake process as possible, while aiding the client to obtain the rest of the paperwork and describing the benefits of JTPA participation.

C. Retention Strategy #3: Intake Office Atmosphere

Another intake issue concerns the "atmosphere" of program facilities. When clients first come into contact with the JTPA system, they are looking for signs that the organization is caring and competent. The facility, its location and decoration says volumes about the "personality" of the organization. That first impression should say, "Have confidence in us, we delver."

A fresh coat of paint may be all that is required. It also helps to decorate the facility with motivational and success posters. For example, some programs have decorated their walls with lists of "Who's Who in Hiring," a GED graduation roll, a job placement board, candid photos of clients in training, on the job and in social situations, or lists of current job openings.

Such motivators should be located at a variety of points throughout the facility to reinforce the crucial first impression.

Other "atmospherics" include plants, couches in the waiting room, background music, magazines, lamps and other "homey" touches.

D. Retention Strategy #4: Shake the Poverty and Bureaucracy Image

The works and images used by staff to describe the JTPA program strongly affect retention. Staff should avoid using degrading and humiliating terms like "poverty," "economically disadvantaged," "poor," and "low income." It is far better to say, "We serve those who need our help the most. Let's see how we can get you in the program."

Rather than saying, "We serve high school dropouts, welfare recipients, dislocated workers, older workers, offenders, etc.", say, "We serve youth looking for ther first job. We serve mothers who are now single who are trying to support their families. We serve workers who have worked in industries that have been cut back or closed. We serve older Americans who want to remain useful and productive." Has an entirely different ring to it, doesn't it? Imagine how much better the latter description will sound to employers when you are making a job development call.

Avoiding social services jargon allows clients to maintain their dignity and self-respect. It is an essential first step toward better retention.

E. Retention Strategy #5: Defining Responsibility for Retention

Staff should clearly define (among themselves and to clients) who is responsible to follow clients who are lost between the cracks. Often this occurs when the client moves from one department of a job training program to another.

For example, a client completes intake and is scheduled for assessment but does not show up. In many JTPA programs, no one is directly responsible for contacting the client quickly to encourage him or her to reschedule the assessment. If it is no one's job to resell a wavering client on the benefits of JTPA, this important task is likely to be overlooked and the client lost.

It is critical that the responsibility be defined because this reselling needs to occur within one to three days after the client has missed an appointment or failed to check in. After that, your chances of success drop off rapidly.

In many SDAs, staff will only recontact these "lost" clients during recruitment slumps. For the client it is too little, and far too late. As a result, the response rate is generally fairly low.

Grand Rapids, Michigan, has had great success following up on clients who drop out during the intake process. Previously, about 40 percent of applicants began, but did not complete, their paperwork. To increase applicant retention, intake center staff began phoning them to discover whether they were having problems and needed more help. Staff found that most applicants still wanted services but were frustrated with some aspect of the paperwork process, such as obtaining a copy of a Social Security card or wage documentation. Staff began offering special help to solve these problems. Within three months, the applicant non-completion rate had declined to just 22 percent.

A similar tactic is to phone clients the day before (or morning of) their scheduled appointment and remind them. Such calls are commonly made by physicians' and dentists' offices. They will work to decrease the "no-show" rate in JTPA, too.

F. Retention Strategy #6: Do Not Hide Supportive Services

During the initial interview, staff should inform clients about all the support services available through JTPA. Often such services as day care and transportation assistance are the deciding factors in a client's continued involvement with JTPA.

For example, Lisa Parkins, the young mother in the Family Independence Program, was fortunate enough to have a grandmother nearby who looked after her children. Her brother patched up an old car and gave it to her. Without this support, Lisa said she would have dropped out of the program long ago. Those not as fortunate as Lisa Parkins must rely on the SDA for help.

Yet many program staff fear that if all clients are told about support services, all will want them. So clients are not told unless they specifically ask. Few ask because few know support services are available. This practice stems from a natural desire by the program to save money. But from a client retention standpoint it seems shortsighted. A handful of clients will abuse the system. But clients who genuinely need extra support to stay in a JTPA program must hear about these services first.

One way to introduce the issue of support services is to tell the client:

> If you need help with transportation, child care, or other special needs, talk with a staff member. We can help you solve these problems so they don't keep you from getting new skills and a good job.

VI. TECHNIQUES FOR INREASING RETENTION AFTER ENROLLMENT

The previous section ended with a discussion of the importance of maintaining motivation through the intake and eligibility process. In this section, we will discuss how to increase client retention in JTPA programs.

It sometimes seems almost impossible to motivate "hard-core" JTPA clients and prevent them from dropping out. JTPA professionals know all too well that many participants are not there

willingly. Some have been sent by criminal justice authorities or by parents. Some enroll as a pre-condition to receiving (or continuing) AFDC benefits. Such clients will enter your program in low spirits, kicking and screaming all the way. They will feel coerced, that their freedom has been taken away by bureaucratic forces. Other clients enter the program with little or no self-esteem. Some virtually dare you to teach them anything. It's not the best sort of learning environment. Surprisingly, though, you can often ignite participants' enthusiasm reasonably quickly. The key is to inspire and sustain a realistic hope that tomorrow will be better than today. For most people, hope is a powerful motivator. The absence of hope is a sure death-knell to even the best-intentioned program. For example, the lack of hope felt by many long-term AFDC recipients has undermined even well-designed JTPA programs. Still, much can be done to rekindle hope that has seemingly vanished. These techniques are particularly useful in classroom skills training and work-readiness programs. On-the-job training strategies will be covered in the sections on post-placement retention.

G. Retention Strategy #7: Empower Your Clients

Of the major motivators and program activities that will be outlined here, perhaps the most important is empowerment. Empowering clients means giving them genuine control over aspects of the program. It is the first step in convincing them that their own efforts are important — that they can be masters of their own fates. An important lesson learned during the War on Poverty in the 1960s was that programs succeeded or failed not based on their ability to provide new or better services but on their ability to get the poor to actively participate in the decision-making process. For example, housing projects fixed up by residents are more likely to stay in good repair than those repaired by government contractors.

Many JTPA programs empower clients through individualized instruction. By letting clients move ahead at their own pace, staff can begin to ingrain a sense a personal power and self-esteem. Computerized remedial education programs, such as Robert Taggart's U.S. Basics, represent the state of the art of individualized instruction. Remedial instruction is notoriously unpopular among JTPA clients, youth in particular. Yet self-empowerment can overcome this aversion. For example, one U.S. Basics site, the Davenport Career Development Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan, boasts an 85 percent completion rate. Other programs are having similar success.

Much has been written about individualized instruction. However, empowerment goes much further than that. There are two ways of giving power to clients. First, you can seek the participant's advice in decisions that affect the work they do. For example, clients can be given control over such things as:

- the number and length of breaks during training;
- whether smoking will be permitted and where;
- stocking vending machines and re-ordering stock;
- whether food is allowed in class;
- cleaning the training sites;
- passing out and collecting training materials;
- attendance policies;
- rules and regulations;
- recognition systems; and
- who to invite as guest speakers.

Pre-employment programs may find it beneficial to ask participants to elect officers or committee chairpersons. These trainees could be responsible for decisions on the items listed above. One JTPA program had participants elect an attendance committee to call each absent trainee and encourage him or her to show up the next day. Phone calls from peers had more impact than phone calls from staff. Still other programs have let participants hold their own fund-raising events (car washes, sandwich sales, etc.) and use the proceeds for social events.

Empowerment must be genuine. Staff must abide by the decisions of clients, even if they are obviously misguided. Therefore, it's useful to place limits so the decision is always acceptable. For example, to help clients choose the next guest speaker in a pre-employment program, provide a list of 20 or 30 acceptable alternatives from which to choose.

When we take away power and make decisions for clients that they could make for themselves, we contribute to creating "learned helplessness."

There is a big difference between doing something you decided and doing what someone else told you to do.

For example, a recent study documented the value of empowerment in a comparison of two nursing homes. Where they had control, the residents had a statistically significantly longer life expectancy than the unempowered residents of another home. Medical staff in the first home did not do anything for residents that they could do for themselves: prepare menus, cook meals, make beds, dictate the daily schedule, etc. In the comparison home, the staff did everything.

Not only did the life expectancy of the second group go down. These residents also ceased to do simple daily tasks for themselves. They became totally dependent on the staff. The lesson seems clear.

Giving JTPA clients a genuine opportunity to participate in the design and implementation of the program is just one form of empowerment. You can also ask clients to help solve problems facing the organization. For example, staff could ask clients to help solve problems such as recruitment, placement, attendance, etc. The more clients have invested in the system, the harder they work to make it successful. The goal is to help clients to begin seeing the problems facing the organization as problems facing them. Then clients are not on the outside looking in but are on the inside looking out — an excellent retention strategy.

H. Retention Strategy #8: Developing a Recognition System

Giving clients the power to make a choice is crucial to better retention; giving them recognition — positive re-enforcement — when they make the right choice is equally so. Recognition should be more than just a pat on the back — it should be built into the very fabric of a JTPA program. All human beings want to be recognized for their achievements. Unfortunately, much of the recognition earned by JTPA participants has been negative.

Developing a recognition system is fairly simple and straightforward. First you will want to list all the program milestones in the program. These might include:

- Completing intake, orientation and assessment;
- Completing the program;
- Achieving Employability Development Plan goals;
- Returning to school;
- Joining the military;
- Enrolling in postsecondary school;
- Earning GED;
- Getting a job;
- Completing PE;
- Keeping the job 30 days;
- Keeping the job 60 days; and
- Keeping the job 90 days.

Next, list all the behaviors that you want to see exhibited in the program and on the job. To be useful, the behaviors must be objective. For example, "has a good attitude" is too subjective. Below is a list of behaviors that deserve special recognition because they are important for retention on the job:

- Daily attendance;
- Calling program when not attending;
- Showing up on time;
- Keeping interview appointments set up by staff;
- Arranging own job interviews;
- Completing a study unit successfully;
- Recruiting others to program;
- Helping others with assignments; and
- Being busy when the instructor is in the room.

Using a combination of these criteria, programs can also give an award for "Participant of the Week" or month. Again, the system must be objective. The criteria for recognition must be understood by the participants so they can earn it. They should be able to identify the award and know that if they do x, y, and z they will be "Student of the Week." If this key ingredient is missing from the recognition system, it will appear to be a popularity contest. Finally, recognition techniques need to be linked to the program milestones and behaviors identified by staff. An encouraging word from staff is probably the most common type of recognition. But other recognition devices can be equally effective. Used together, they can be hugely successful in improving retention. JTPA programs have used these

recognition techniques:

- Certificates of achievement;
- Bulletin board announcements;
- Success stories in newspapers;
- "Honor roll" listings in newspapers;
- Trophies;
- Letter from staff;
- Letter from Congressman (All you have to dois ask. They are happy to oblige.);
- Recognition banquet;
- GED graduation ceremony;
- Novelty gift such as a coffee cup or t-shirt;
- Photographs;
- Membership cards;
- Letter of reference for employers from staff;
- A graduation card signed by all staff; and
- A congratulation-on-your-new-job card.

Some people are skeptical that such "Mickey Mouse" items such as certificates or membership cards will motivate hard-to-serve clients such as inner-city youth or older workers. But impact has little to do with the size or nature of the reward. What is more important is the act of being recognized. Often, you can build recognition systems into games that teach retention. For example, Cygnet staff have used the children's game of "hangman" to instill good work habits and attitudes. At the beginning of the program, each participant drew an empty scaffold on a piece of paper and posted it on the bulletin board. A body part was added to the "noose" whenever a participant failed to demonstrate a behavior from the list given out at the beginning of the program.

Another successful retention "game" consists of a construction-paper "racetrack" posted on a bulletin board. Each participant cuts out a paper car and pins it to the starting line. Whenever a participant completes a program milestone, his or her racecar advances one space. A lighthearted competition develops to see who can arrive first at "Easy Street" (getting a job).

No doubt you can think of other ways to use behaviorally based games to build motivation and increase retention. These really work, no matter how juvenile they may appear.

It is critical to understand that to build and shape new behaviors in clients requires more than an annual graduation ceremony for the GED completers or a certificate at the conclusion of training. It really requires a comprehensive, consistent, systematic approach.

I. Retention Strategy #9: Stretch Clients' Belief in the Possible

Motivation is also affected by a person's sense of achievement.

People need to feel that they are moving ahead and achieving a goal. As staff we have the responsibility to encourage clients to go beyond what they thought they could achieve. We need to urge them to do what they can't quite believe they can do — both in the classroom and on the job.

Often in JTPA, we do the opposite. Staff ask, "When should we be realistic with these clients and tell them they cannot be what they want to be? They don't have the skills or background." Unless you want to rob them of the motivation to achieve their dreams or want to create learned helplessness, the answer is — NEVER! Many people in this country have overcome incredible odds to get where they are. Rocky Blier — in the Super Bowl — was told years earlier, after an injury in the Viet Nam war, that he would never walk again. A high-school dropout welfare mother with three children and no money wanted to be a physician. Job training staff tried to talk her into being a nurse's aide. The woman, on her own, went on to get her GED, a college diploma and her degree in medical school. She is now a practicing physician in California.

Recently, viewers of "Good Morning America" saw a child with Down's syndrome reading a book aloud. Jim Abbot, a pitcher for the U.S. Olympic Baseball team, does not have a right hand. He was even drafted by a major league baseball team recently. Would you have talked these people out of their dreams? To foster motivation, we need to play the role of helper, not stumbling block. We should show people how to achieve their dreams, not destroy them with talk of "realistic" expectations. When we tell someone what they can't achieve it says more about us than the client.

Clearly, staff should not second-guess a client's ability to achieve a goal and dissuade him or her

from reaching for it. It is better for retention if staff give the client a realistic picture of the steps required to reach the goal and encourage the client toward it. If the client decides that it is too hard, or not worth the effort, then the client (not the staff) can decide to redirect his or her goals. JTPA clients must make their own choices. We cannot make their choices for them. A sense of achievement is reinforced when staff write positive notes on client worksheets. Staff can also meet with clients periodically to review their progress. The instructor will want to show clients how far they have progressed since beginning the program.

J. Retention Strategy #10: Make the Training or Education Rewarding and Challenging in Itself

Training material must be matched to the skill level of the client. If it is too far above, the material is intimidating; if too far below, it is boring. With clients of different skills, it may be necessary to use materials at several levels of difficulty. For example, on a "How to Read the Want Ads" exercise, low level readers could be given a simple worksheet, whereas more skilled clients could be given a more challenging activity. To make the class rewarding, instructors will also want to use a wide variety of teaching techniques. Lecture and worksheets alone are not enough. Small groups, brainstorming, role plays, films, discussions, worksheets, self - assessments and lecturettes all play a role. No one teaching method should predominate. To change attitudes, lecture is the least effective teaching method, yet the most widely used. Classes should be structured so that clients actually want to come to the program because class itself is fun and interesting.

K. Retention Strategy #11: Teach Retention

Most JTPA programs hold job search workshops which cover the basics of interviewing, reading want-ads, completing applications, etc. Far fewer spend time teaching the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to retain a job. And even then some clients either do not have to attend the classes or are sent out on job interviews before they complete the job retention unit.

Every client should go through some type of retention training. Research shows that we are not very good predictors of a client's success. Therefore, do not let some clients skip retention training. We all know examples of clients we thought were risky placements, but we saw them blossom and succeed. Conversely, some of our "best" clients turn out to be the least successful.

In a recent study, from the Greater Washington Research Center, surveyors found that employers looked for five characteristics in applicants for entry level positions: attendance, punctuality, appearance, initiative, and attitude. Retention training, therefore, should focus heavily on these five characteristics. Additionally, training should cover conflict resolution, decision making and how to quit a job.

Obviously, hundreds of other retention topics could be taught. However, in setting priorities we should divide topics into three categories: need-to-know, should-know and nice-to-know. In a short training, only the eight need-to-know topics cited above can be covered.

L. Retention Strategy #12: Extend the Length of Work-Readiness Training

We also need to make sure that retention training is of sufficient duration to actually make a difference in a client's post-placement performance.

Program has major implications for job retention. By design, many programs such as direct placement and OJT do little to modify the attitudes and behaviors of clients prior to placement. For these programs, on-the-job retention is the only issue that counts. Success depends on careful selection of clients who already possess good work habits. If a ready supply of such clients is not available, program operators should have no illusions about their ability to increase on-the-job retention.

In many JTPA programs, work habits and attitudes are instilled during work readiness programs. These can be either free-standing programs or components of classroom-type training. In many SDAs, work-readiness is confined to a brief seminar, sometimes only an hour or two long. One and two-day workshops are most typical.

But, realistically, how long does it take to reshape a person's work habits, attitudes and be-

haviors? Research seems to indicate that behavior modification takes longer than we would hope. For example, one study found that four to six weeks of half-day work-readiness training sessions produced measurable post-placement gains in labor market retention and wages. Another program, which offered one-day workshops, was found to have little impact on post-placement retention. In another study, one week of work-readiness training had little impact on job retention among a group of Chicago-area AFDC recipients.

It takes longer, of course, to reverse serious employment barriers. And, unless a program is carefully designed, clients quickly lose patience and quit.

M. Retention Strategy #13: Let Clients Practice

"I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." Most people are familiar with this old Chinese maxim. It is also good advice for increasing JTPA program retention and impact.

The past five years have seen a major shift toward competency-based training. From a retention standpoint, this is very good news. "Doing" is inherently more motivating than "hearing." Too many JTPA programs, however, are still too much talk and not enough action. There is a crucial difference between information dissemination and learning. For example, very little learning takes place in a work-readiness seminar in which an instructor stands before the participants talking about job-getting "do's "and"don'ts." It is a classic case of "in one ear and out the other." To in grain more positive work habits and attitudes, participants must:

a) Know the difference between desirable and undesirable work habits;
b) Desire to learn the desirable traits;
c) Understand the skills needed to acquire these traits;
d) Have the opportunity to practice the skills; and
e) Be rewarded for successfully using their new skills.

These factors are very similar to the list of three ingredients of work satisfaction devised by Dr. Richard Green, a labor professor. For work to be motivational, he said, an individual must:

a) Possess a skill;
b) Have an opportunity to use the skill and see the results; and
c) Be praised by at least one person he or she respects. To improve program retention, then, the best results are likely to be gained from a competency-based, behavioral approach.

N. Retention Strategy #14: Program Facilities — The Look and Feel

The "atmosphere" of your classroom has a decided impact on client retention. Your goal is to create an environment that is attractive, motivating, uplifting. The new director of an occupational training center once told us he was planning to do away with the "success story" decorations that covered the walls. The photos of past participants and their families, the encouraging slogans, the list of currently working trainees — these, he felt, detracted from the low-key, business-like environment he hoped to create But we encouraged him to keep things just as they were. What new trainees needed most was a booster shot of hope. There would be plenty of time to get used to the mundane realities of the business world. Other ideas for program site decor include:

- Testimonials from past trainees;
- Letters and postcards from previous trainees;
- Lists of employers who have hired your trainees;
- Lists of graduates;
- Lists of people who have earned their GED;
- Candid photos from training sessions or social activities; and
- Motivational posters and slogans.

The goal is to make participants feel at home and that the program is their own, that the program is the place they most want to be.

O. Retention Strategy #15: Lure Them Back

No program will ever sustain a 100 percent success rate. Some clients will quit no matter what you do. Others you will ask to leave because of on-going attitude or behavior problems.

But too many programs lose enrollees unnecessarily. Some of the reasons include:

1. Has problems at home;
2. Has unreliable transportation;
3. Misses a couple of sessions, then quits;
4. Moves to a new location farther from the training site;
5. Has recurrence of drug or alcohol problem; and
6. Is not referred to a job as soon as expected.

The basic solution to all these problems lies in developing an ongoing relationship with each client. Staff need to know about home situations, transportation and the like. Unless a staff/client relationship is given time to develop, retention will always be a problem.

Sometimes, extraordinary personal commitment is required to keep participants in a program. For example, a hotel manager in Texas who operated a youth training program for the local PIC frequently drove to trainees' homes to roust them out of bed when they were late.

Additional techniques available to lure back program dropouts include the following:

1. Telephone calls. Do not hesitate to "hound" clients until they either return to the program or tell you to get lost. Be friendly but persistent. It is often a good idea to get the phone numbers of a grandparent and a friend or two so you can track down clients who change residences.

2. Letters. Develop a series of letters that can be sent to clients who suddenly drop out of sight. Bombard each client with a mixture of calls and letters. Initially, contact them two or three times a week. If they fail to respond, call or write every two weeks for the next month. Then call or write every month for up to six months. Keep letters friendly in tone but urgent. A cold, bureaucratic tone will alienate clients. Letters should start out with something like, "Close. So close to a steady job and a big fat paycheck. Don't stop now."

3. Personal visits. Often there is no substitute for a face-to-face discussion. Since these visits take time, save them for your most promising clients or those who have dropped out for an easily resolvable reason. If the client is young, it sometimes helps to visit with a parent or guardian.

4. Visits by other participants. Sometimes, only a friend or peer has the credibility to lure a wayward client back into the fold.

P. Retention Strategy #16: Hire Staff Carefully

It is almost impossible to over-emphasize the central role of program staff to client retention. One study by the American Vocational Association, for example, showed that the chief reason why students quit training programs is because they do not like their instructors.

In JTPA programs, the instructor's role is even more critical. Many JTPA clients lack a strong sense of self-esteem. Particularly in the early phase of a program, their motivation to stay in the program often stems from their desire to please the instructor, rather than to please themselves. In such situations, the instructor is more than a teacher — he or she can become a parental authority figure.

It is no revelation to suggest that program planners should choose staff carefully. But it is useful to give staffing decisions their proper place near the very top of the retention agenda. Think of every top-notch model program you have ever heard of — isn't there always a single charismatic individual who makes it all come together?

And it is the trait of individual charisma that is too often overlooked in program staff selection. Since most JTPA programs are short-term (at best), personal magnetism can be the one force that can motivate participants and electrify their actions. Without it, even the best-designed program will gradually lose energy and momentum.

VII. IMPROVING ON-THE-JOB RETENTION

To help clients improve their economic situation, job training professionals must help participants who are placed on jobs stay on those jobs. For most of the clients served in a JTPA program, keeping a job one year would be a great improvement in their work histories.

Yet studies have shown that the vast majority of trainees who get fired or quit their jobs do so within the first two weeks of placement. Thus, the transitional period between program participation and placement is crucial. The relationship between the client and the program should not end at placement, but only when the positive termination period has passed and the client has a high probability of continued success. Some JTPA programs make participants unofficial lifelong "members", offering them counseling, support and job-hunting services whenever needed.

There are many strategies and techniques for increasing the retention rates of clients once they are on the job. However, in this section we will highlight nine of them.

Q. Retention Strategy #17: Job Matching Systems

Appropriate job matching involves a minimum of three factors: skills, personality and economic need. Formal assessment instruments can measure aptitudes, interests, work values, career development and academic skills. The results of these can be used to evaluate the client side of the equation. However, equally important is learning more about the employer . . . . . Unfortunately, employers cannot or do not always accurately describe the characteristics necessary for success on the job. In the worst case, employers who are trying hard to fill an undesirable job will play up the benefits.

Therefore, it is sometimes helpful to conduct a job analysis. This is especially true when either the job developer is not familiar with the job being offered to a client or an employer is being tried for the first time.

A job analysis identifies job tasks and the skills, knowledge, abilities and responsibilities required of a worker to be successful. To get a realistic picture of job requirements, the job developer will need to know:

- what the worker is expected to do in relation to data, people or objects;
- the machines, tools and equipment used;
- the traits of a successful worker; and
- the materials, products or services which are the product of the job.

The methods of conducting the analysis are interview and observation.

Another important component of the job match is economic need. Clients should not be placed into jobs that they cannot afford to keep. Some SDAs ask clients to fill in a monthly budget sheet to determine how much income they need (at minimum) to meet monthly financial needs. This total is divided by the average number of hours worked in a week to produce an estimated "hourly wage needed". If the client needs to make $5.50 an hour yet lacks necessary skills, program staff have two options. First, they can encourage the client to go into classroom training to develop the skills for the higher paying job. Second, they can help the client create a new personal budget that would make a lower-wage job feasible. It is critical that the staff show the client the likely pay-raise points and the subsequent impact on their budget. Clients need to feel some hope that they won't be working for low wages forever.

R. Retention Strategy #18: Job Previews

The evidence from available research indicates that realistic job previews tend to reduce turnover and have a positive effect on job attitudes.

The general notion is that applicants given a realistic preview of the job prior to employment will be less likely to harbor inflated expectations as employees. The degree to which expectations are met is thought to be an important determinant of turnover. As a result, the reduction of initially inflated expectations theoretically should result in better retention. Accurate job previews also allow individuals to effectively self-select and match themselves to a company.

The most effective method of conducting the job preview is to allow applicants to speak to people who currently work at the business. It is best if these incumbents are not supervisors, but at the same level as the applicant's new position. This allows the appplicant to get personally relevant infomation about his or her concerns. Applicants are more likely to trust incumbents and perceive them as more knowledegable about the job than other sources of information.

Alternate sources of job previews include meetings with the job developers, literature provided by the hiring company, and Department of Labor descriptions.

S. Retention Strategy #19: Post-Placement Follow-up

The decision to leave a job is a time–consuming process that includes thinking about leaving, thinking about another job search, generating alternatives and then deciding to quit or to stay. It is not a spontaneous act. It builds over time.

The same is true for employers. Their decision to fire a worker is not haphazard, but the final act of a long-building frustration. The nearer we intervene to the time these decisions are being made, the greater the likelihood that we can influence the decisions.

Follow-up with the employer is a critical component to keeping clients on jobs. Unfortunately, some of the follow-up being done in JTPA systems is more for bureaucratic reasons than for continuation of the long-term employability of the clients. Often follow-up is only conducted with clients on OJT contracts (because follow-up is mandatory) and only focuses on technical questions such as wage rates, number of hours worked, etc.

Because of the Department of Labor's growing emphasis on long-term job rentention rates, it is worthwhile to expand the follow-up concept to include all trainees – direct placement, classroom graduate placements, self-directed placements, and OJTs. It is also time to develop follow-up systems that continue employability development begun when the clients was in the program.

Some JTPA staff object to follow-up on the grounds that it takes too much time, or that employers don't want to be bothered. On the contrary, by increasing positive termination rates, the benefits of follow-up far outweight the disadvantages. For example, follow-up can:

1. Reduce time spent job developing — Higher positive termination rates mean less work and less frustration for job developers. In addition, better retention stimulates a good word-of-mouth reputation among employers, making job development more efficient.

2. Get more repeat business from employers — Job retention is a major expectation of most employers. The better your retention record, the easier it will be to get more job orders from the same employers.

3. Increase client's long-term labor market retention — Most JTPA clients have had jobs in the past. Their major problem has been holding on to them. Structured follow-up can set the trainee on the right path.

4. Ensure that more clients get raises and promotions — Longer job retention increases the probability that a trainee will begin moving up the career ladder and earning wages above the subsistence level.

5. Ease pressures on client recruitment — Higher positive termination rates mean fewer "recruits" are needed to meet performance goals. Thus, follow-up can also save thousands of dollars in advertising expenses every year. In addition, the good word-of-mouth generated by higher number of trainees who are placed successfully helps make recruitment even easier.

6. Decrease turnover among job developers — Many SDAs experience high turnover rates among job developers. While the job is inherently frustrating, it is more satisfying when clients stay on the job and employers enthusiastically support JTPA.

In short, employers will welcome follow-up as "service after the sale." And clients, while they may not fully appreciate the value of follow-up, will benefit in the long run.

T. Retention Strategy #20: Trainee-Focused Follow-up

A good follow-up system will focus on helping both the trainee and the employer get used to one another. Usually, trainees do not quit their jobs in a fit of pique. Their unhappiness builds over time, then suddenly boils over — the proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back." The same is true for employers. Their decision to fire a

worker is not haphazard, but the final act of a long-building frustration. To help trainees stay on the job longer, it is helpful to maintain communication so that you can spot and resolve problems early — and quickly. Trainee-focused follow-up contains several components:

1. Personal or telephone contact at pre-deter mined intervals after placement;
2. Continued use of recognition and reward systems;
3. Use of specific behavioral criteria on which both the trainee and the employer agree; and
4. Exit interviews for employers and employees when a placement is unsuccessful.

Retention can be improved most by programs that have developed a personal relationship with the client. Opportunities are rather limited where clients have gone directly from intake into an OJT or direct placement. Obviously, the most job-ready clients in these programs will have the best retention.

Because many clients lose their jobs rather quickly, it is important to conduct follow-up at the end of the first and second week. To ensure longer-term retention, follow-up should also be conducted after the fourth and sixth weeks — even if your SDA counts a positive termination after just 21 or 30 days. The goal of JTPA is to help people get into the labor market and stay there. Your role in achieving that goal often must stretch beyond the official positive termination period.

Some SDAs still count a positive termination after a trainee has been on the job only one day. These systems can be very demoralizing for staff. In such circumstances it is very difficult to overcome staff feelings of cynicism or to motivate them to conduct follow-up.

Notice that the questions are very specific and relate to desirable on-the-job knowledge and behavior. The questions also probe for initial job-adjustment problems. In subsequent questionnaires, the nature of the questions changes to rekindle the client's dreams and focus his or her attention on the paycheck and what it will buy. This is a powerful "carrot" that motivates clients to solve problems and develop more mature behavior that contributes most to long-term retention.

Later on, follow-up questions inquire whether the client is kept busy and is learning new skills — in other words, whether opportunities for promotions and raises exist, two key factors in long-term retention.

Incidentally, if your program holds an employer recognition banquet every year (a very good idea), the follow-up interview provides a good opportunity to identify nominees for "Employer of the Year."

Throughout client follow-up, a primary goal is to keep the lines of communication open and to establish the job developer as a neutral third-party to resolve potential problems.

For example, a youth program in Pennsylvania placed a young man on a job at a department store loading dock. During work readiness training, he learned the value of keeping busy on the job. During a slow period at the loading dock, a supervisor from another department asked the young man to help with a task elsewhere in the store. The young man's supervisor was angry that he had left his post without asking permission. The young man, on the other hand, was angry and frustrated and wanted to quit his job. But because a good relationship existed between the job developer and the trainee, the problem was resolved during a routine one-week follow-up conversation. The 10-minute phone call preserved the young man's job, taught him additional job-keeping skills (ask permission before you leave your post) and kept the employer happy. That's a pretty good return on a 10-minute investment of time.

U. Retention Strategy #21; Exit Interviews

Not all clients will stay on the job as long as you want. When trainees quit or get fired, it is important to conduct an exit interview as quickly as possible to find out why. Such interviews are a valuable form of market research. They can help you identify problems with training, job-matching and other program components.

A separation interview should include the following questions:

1. What was the main reason you left your job?
2. What were the best parts of your job?
3. What were the worst parts of your job?
4. What did you like most about your supervisor?
5 What did you like least about your supervisor?
6. What recommendations would you make to us when placing someone at (name of company)?
7. What, if anything, would have kept you on the job longer?
8. If you accepted another job, what does that job offer that your job here did not?
9. Was the job you held accurately described when you were hired?
10. What constructive comments would you have for your boss with regard to making the comany a better place to work?
11. Would you recommend this company to a friend as a place to work? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Ideally, the exit interview comments would be presented in the form of a report on a quarterly basis. This would allow the staff to examine trends and make necessry program changes. Exit interview reports would also make excelent training materials for new job developers and counselors, providing a perspective on how clients view their jobs and what makes them lekely to quit.

V. Retention Strategy #22: Incentive Systems

Incentive programs are used in the private sector to address a growing retention problem amoung entry level workers. These programs can ncrease the value of the job by offering prizes or gifts to workers who stay on the job for a designated period of time. Job training programs could adap t the same strategy to build client retentioln. For example, an incentive rogram could be designed so that any clieent who remained on the job for 90 days would have his or her name entered into a drawing for $25 workth of lettery tickets, a weenend for two at a resort hotel or a $100 gift certificat at a local store. Prizes could be donated by area businessess.

the point is to increase the value ofl staying on the job. To make an incentive system work, you must remind clienst constantly that it exists. Postcards could be sent to their homes counting down the weeks; phone calls could be made; or during the personal client followup visits the incentive prizes could be reviewed. Note that an incentive system also adds a valuable reason for clients to stay in touch with the training program. If they move or change jobs, they're more likely to call program staff.

W. Retention Strategy #23: Employer-Focused Retention

Not every failed placement can be blamed on the client. Many supervisors, especially in low-wage, low-skill industries, have very poor management skills. Some companies purposely tolerate high levels of employee turnover so they can continue to maintain low levels of pay, benefits and working conditions. Fortunately, this situation is changing as employers begin to face dwindling numbers of new workers in the labor pool. Now it is often more profitable to improve working conditions than to spend money on recruitment and training.

Most companies, however, have a genuine desire to upgrade the skills of their supervisors. In this, several JTPA agencies are beginning to play an innovative role. For example, JTPA programs in Florida and Virginia offer personnel management skills workshops to employers. Some programs even charge a nominal fee to produce extra income and increase the employers' perceived value of the workshops. Workshop topics have included job descriptions, conflict resolution and performance appraisal. Other potential workshops that affect job retention include: designing an employee orientation, supervision, interviewing skills , and how to build on employee recognition system.

Such workshops are a first-rate public relations idea and can create an image of JTPA as a community resource rather than a "welfare" type program.

But increasing the employer's role in client retention need not be so elaborate. The ingredients for succcess are much the same as for client retention: regular follow-up; agreed-upon goals; open lines of communication; and recognition for achievement.

The employer should be involved from the beginning. He or she needs to know that follow-up is a built-in service designed to benefit both the employer and the client — it is not just an annoying bureaucratic intrusion.

X. Retention Strategy #24: Post-PlacementRecognition Systems

Recognition and reward systems can also be used to increase client retention. Of course, every employer who hires a trainee should receive a thank you letter from the program director. Many programs also award each employer a special certificate of recognition for their role in contributing to local economic development. You would be surprised how many employers will display these certificates in a prominent place.

One of the biggest advantages of follow-up is that it provides the perfect opportunity to develop additional job openings. A satisfied employer will be much more likely to offer additional jobs for JTPA clients. And if you conduct placement pro-actively (seeking a job for a specific client, rather than matching clients to incoming job orders), follow-up gives you an ideal "excuse" for contacting the employer without seeming pushy. For the job development opportunities alone, follow-up is a highly cost-effective use of time.

VIII. RETAINING EMPLOYERS THROUGH GOOD TIMES AND BAD

One other retention issue deserves your attention: retaining employers as regular JTPA customers. The best employer retention technique, of course, is providing good employees in a timely fashion. But other techniques can increase even a satisfied employer's loyalty to and support of your JTPA program.

Employer retention is no trivial issue. JTPA programs rely heavily on goodword-of-mouth advertising for placement success. Keeping your current customers happy is the best way to make future job development easier.

In addition, maintaining a roster of repeat customers helps take much of the pressure off the overworked job developers. No JTPA program can succeed for long if it must develop a brand new opening for every client.

Keeping your customers happy is a kind of marketing known as "relationship management." Here are some ideas for increasing the amount of repeat business, even when placements turn out badly.

1. Give monthly and yearly awards for employers who hire the most trainees or experience the greatest business growth as a result of hiring through JTPA.
2. Give novelty gifts such as coffee mugs or calendars to repeat customers.
3. Distribute a program newsletter highlighting employer success stories.
4. Write news releases spotlighting local employers who regularly hire through JTPA.
5. Distribute testimonials from satisfied customers (or make sure your job developers have and use them).
6. Hold yearly "employer appreciation" banquets (many JTPA programs pay for them entirely with employer donations or ticket sales).
7. Join business and civic clubs.
8. Attend community ceremonial events, especially if they are business oriented.
9. Purchase your supplies from supportive employers.
10. Ask employers to review your curriculum.
11. Form a "business partners" program to provide input into your training and placement procedures and to encourage other employers to hire through JTPA.
12. Survey business hiring needs.
13. Set up job interview competitions among JTPA program participants and ask employers to serve as judges (sounds far-fetched, but many youth programs have done this successfully for years).

These measure are not substitutes for ongoing person-to-person relationship-building. But they can help the relationship grow faster and deeper. And, of course, employer retention depends heavily on the quality of your client follow-up. Unless you provide this service-after-the-sale, there will be no basis on which your relationship can grow.

IX. CONCLUSION

JTPA client retention is a complex topic. These chapters have only scratched the surface. For example, we have not dealt with the large body of psychological research on "internal"- external control," a prime indicator of self-respect and a potentially powerful retention tool. While important, such research is well beyond the scope of this handbook.

On the other hand, we have tried to emphasize that client retention is not an issue that begins after job placement. By then, it is often too late.

Retention begins with program planning and design continues through recruitment, intake, program participation and job placement. Efforts to improve retention will succeed best when they are comprehensive. This handbook points out some places to start.

Client retention efforts are likely to become more sophsticated as a result of the Labor Department's new followup regulations and its increasing interest in seving clients most in need, The welfare reform law, with its emphasis on job placement and eventual independence, and even greater pressure for JTPA professionals to devise new and more successful rentetion activities.

This handbook, then, is not the final statement on ths complex issue, but only a beginning.